Phaedo

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PLATO

Plato's father Ariston descended from Codrus, the last King of Athens, and his mother Perictione had ties to Solon, one of the creators of the Athenian Constitution. Plato planned a political career until 404 BCE, when Athens shifted to an oligarchy controlled by wealthy men. After democracy was restored in 403 BCE, Plato again considered politics until Socrates, Plato's mentor, was accused of impiety and corruption and subsequently put to death in 399 BCE. Responding to this gross display of injustice, Plato abandoned politics for philosophy. He ultimately produced a volume of work that has heavily influenced Western thought and provided the world with a record not only of Plato's own philosophical thoughts, but also historical documentation of Socrates's influential years in Athens. Concerned with justice, beauty, metaphysics, and equality, Plato influenced many important thinkers by founding the Academy, a philosophy school where Aristotle was a student for twenty years. Aristotle then established his own institution when Plato died in 348 or 347 BCE.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As outlined in *Apology*, Socrates was put on trial in Athens in 399 BCE. Accused of impiety and of corrupting the youth, he was given a chance to defend himself with an *apologia* but was ultimately found guilty by the jury members and sentenced to death, at which point he was imprisoned in Athens. As Plato outlines in *Crito* (which can't necessarily be taken as a reliable historical account), Socrates refused Crito's offer to help him escape before his execution. Consequently, he faced his death shortly thereafter, drinking a liquified mixture of poison hemlock.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Phaedo is closely connected to the other dialogues Plato wrote concerning Socrates. These include *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, and *Phaedrus*, among others. All of these texts illustrate Socrates's commitment to intellectual inquiry and his methods of cross-examination. *Meno* is especially related to *Phaedo*, since Socrates outlines his Theory of Recollection in both dialogues. Furthermore, it's worth noting that Socrates's acquaintance Crito appears (or is mentioned) not only in his eponymous dialogue, but also in *Phaedo*, in another Platonic dialogue called *Euthydemus*, and in *Apology*. Similarly, the philosopher Simmias appears in *Phaedo*, *Crito*, and *Phaedrus*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Phaedo
- **When Written:** Sometime in the 4th Century BCE
- **Literary Period:** Ancient Greek Philosophy
- **Genre:** Philosophy, Philosophical Dialogue, Fiction
- **Setting:** Athens, Greece, where Socrates waits in prison for his execution.
- **Climax:** Having successfully argued for the immortality of the soul, Socrates drinks poison hemlock as his friends and fellow philosophers weep at his side.
- **Antagonist:** None of Socrates's detractors appear in *Phaedo*, and even the jailer who watches over him expresses a fondness for him. Consequently, the only antagonist in the dialogue is lazy or complacent thinking, which Socrates urges his listeners to avoid.
- **Point of View:** Dialogue

EXTRA CREDIT

The Socratic Problem. Socrates was a prolific thinker and well-known philosopher in Ancient Greece, but none of his writing—if indeed he ever wrote anything at all—has survived. For this reason, philosophers and historians must sift through secondary accounts of his scholarship to understand his ideas, studying the works of thinkers like Plato and Xenophon, both of whom wrote about Socrates. The fact that these accounts often contradict one another is known as The Socratic Problem.

Dust in the Wind. In the 1989 film *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (starring Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter), teenagers Bill and Ted travel back in time to Ancient Greece, where they encounter Socrates and, in an attempt to "philosophize" with him, say, "All we are is dust in the wind, dude." This statement deeply impresses the fictionalized Socrates, even if its message of impermanence clashes with the philosopher's belief in the indestructibility of the soul.

PLOT SUMMARY

Phaedo is an account of the final hours before Socrates's execution in prison. It is told by Phaedo himself, a friend of Socrates who encounters Echecrates—a fellow philosopher—after having watched Socrates drink poison hemlock. Phaedo relates the conversation that took place between Socrates and his friends, who sat by him in jail as he argued for the immortality of the soul, among other things.

First, Phaedo explains, Socrates tells his friend Cebes to say

goodbye to the poet Evenus for him, saying: "Wish him well and bid him farewell, and tell him, if he is wise, to follow me as soon as possible." Hearing this, Simmias speaks up, surprised that Socrates would suggest that Evenus should hope to "follow" him to death "as soon as possible." In response, Socrates says that any "man who partakes worthily of philosophy" should be "willing" to die. At the same time, he grants that it's "not right" to take one's own life. When Cebes asks how Socrates can believe that philosophers ought to embrace death while also scorning suicide, Socrates notes that in some cases it's "better" to die than to live. However, humans belong to the gods, so it isn't their choice to decide when, exactly, they die. In response, Cebes and Simmias voice another objection, saying that since the gods are the masters of humans, it doesn't make sense for a person to look forward to death, since this would mean looking forward to losing the influence of a wise master. In turn, Socrates reveals that he believes the soul is immortal, which means a person *doesn't* leave the service of the gods upon death.

Explaining himself, Socrates asserts that "those who practice philosophy in the proper manner" are preparing for death. To show how this is the case, he asserts that the body and soul are separate from one another. The corporeal world is full of distractions, he says, since physical senses are unreliable and can't lend a person a dependable conception of reality. This is why "the philosopher more than other men frees the soul from association with the body," ultimately using the soul to "grasp the truth" without interference from physical concerns. And since death is nothing more than the "separation of the soul from the body," the attempt to live uninfluenced by the body is effectively a preparation for death itself.

Socrates uses the idea of the soul's immortality to show his listeners that he need not fear death. In fact, he believes death will finally afford him the opportunity to find the wisdom he's been searching for his entire life, since he'll be undistracted by the whims of the body. His friends are impressed by his argument, but Cebes notes that most people believe the soul "disperse[s] like breath or smoke" when a person dies, adding that it takes "a good deal of faith" to believe that the soul will go on living without the body. Hearing this, Socrates addresses Cebes's objection by referencing "an ancient theory" that living souls come from the underworld, saying that if this is the case, then souls must surely exist in the underworld, since they "could not come back if they did not exist." As such, he claims that "the living never come from any other source than from the dead." At this point, he suggests that things always come to be "from their opposites," just as something becomes "taller" from having been "shorter" before, and vice versa. What's more, he says that there is also a "process" by which something becomes its opposite, such that to become "taller" from having been "shorter" is known as "increase," and to become "smaller" from having been "taller" is "decrease."

Moving on, Socrates says that in the same way, life and death are opposites that "come to be from one another." As such, "being alive" comes from "being dead," and "being dead" comes from "being alive." The processes that characterize these transformations are "coming to life" and "dying," and Socrates says that these processes "balance" each other out. He then gives an example, saying that if there was no "corresponding process" to that of falling asleep, then everybody would go to sleep forever. By that turn, he says, if every human were to die without coming back to life, everyone would "remain in that state" of death forever, meaning that nobody would be alive. Cebes agrees with this, admitting that he no longer doubts the soul's immortality.

Despite Cebes's agreement, Socrates presents another theory for the soul's immortality. Calling upon The Theory of Recollection, he explains to Simmias that humans never learn new knowledge. Instead, they "recollect" wisdom that their souls have acquired in past lives. Socrates puts forth that the soul has an understanding of the Forms—that is, unchanging ideas unbound by earthly variation. For example, when Simmias sees two similarly sized objects, he thinks of "the Equal," even if the objects aren't *exactly* the same. This, Socrates says, is because Simmias understands—by way of his soul's previously-acquired knowledge—the Form (or idea) of "the Equal." If such Forms "exist" and the soul has learned about them in previous lives, Socrates upholds, then "our soul must exist before we are born."

Simmias accepts that Socrates has proved that the soul exists "before we are born," but not that it continues to live after the death of the body. To address this, Socrates says that the Forms are "noncomposite" and unchanging, whereas physical things—like, for instance, humans or clothing—are "composite" (that is, made of multiple parts) and constantly transforming. He thus identifies two categories of existence: the "invisible" and the "visible." The body, he says, is a "visible" kind of existence, the soul an "invisible." Reminding Simmias and Cebes that the soul is able to attain wisdom if it rejects the whims of the body, Socrates asserts that the "invisible" category of existence is similar to that which is "divine" and "deathless." Going on, he says that it is "natural for the body to dissolve easily, and for the soul to be altogether indissoluble." In keeping with this, when people die, their bodies decay while their souls, if they have been made "pure" through wisdom, will "make [their] way to the invisible," which is "divine and immortal and wise." A soul like this will enjoy a wonderful afterlife amongst the gods, but if it has been too entangled with corporeal existence, it will languish in the underworld before coming back as an inferior being.

Both Cebes and Simmias admit that they have reservations but don't want to "bother" Socrates with their objections, since he's soon to die. Nonetheless, he urges them to voice their thoughts, so Simmias presents his issue with Socrates's ideas

regarding the visible and the invisible. He says that a person could "make the same argument [as Socrates] about harmony, lyre and strings"—namely, that "a harmony is something invisible, without a body," while the lyre and strings that *make* that harmony are visible and physical. If one were to break the lyre, he says, the harmony would have to somehow continue to exist, at least according to Socrates's view of immortality. This, Simmias says, is obviously illogical, since the harmony comes from the lyre and thus can't exist once it has been destroyed. He asks Socrates how he might answer someone who sees the soul's relationship to the body in a similar light.

Before answering Simmias's question, Socrates asks Cebes to also voice his objection, and Cebes says that he has a hard time believing that the soul is immortal. To make his point, he compares the relationship between the body and soul to that of a weaver and his cloak. Throughout the weaver's life, he fashions a number of cloaks, all of which eventually wear out. However, the cloak he weaves just before he himself dies will outlast him. "That does not mean that a man is inferior and weaker than a cloak," Cebes says, adding that—in a similar fashion—it would be nonsensical to say that "the soul lasts a long time while the body is weaker and more short-lived;" just because the soul "wears out many bodies" doesn't mean it will continue to do so *forever*, he notes. After all, it might go through multiple bodies but eventually perish along with one of them.

Considering Simmias and Cebes's objections, Socrates appears grateful, since they've given him a chance to clarify his meaning. He then turns his attention to Simmias's notion of the soul as a harmony, reminding him that he previously agreed with The Theory of Recollection, which upholds that the soul exists before body. This, he points out, means that the soul isn't a harmony produced by the body, since it has already existed on its own. Simmias agrees with this, but Socrates adds another point: a harmony can never contain "wickedness," since "wickedness" is an instance of "disharmony," and a thing can never be both itself and its opposite at the same time.

Moving on to Cebes's objection that the general resilience of the soul doesn't prove its immortality, Socrates turns his attention to "the cause of generation and destruction," a matter he used to think about quite a lot as a young man. Wanting to know why things are the way they are, he adopted the author Anaxagoras's belief that "it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything." However, Socrates says, he soon saw that this theory is unsatisfactory, since Anaxagoras doesn't really use "the Mind" to determine the "cause of everything," instead using unreliable physical and earthly observations. So, Socrates explains, he developed his own theory, which explains the nature of existence by suggesting that a thing is the way it is because of its adherence to certain unchanging Forms. To describe this, he says: "It is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful," suggesting that Beauty itself is a Form. This leads to his final argument for the immortality of the soul.

To begin, he says that nothing can be itself while also being its opposite. What's more, he argues that something that "brings along" a thing will never "bring along" the opposite of that thing as well. Therefore, he concludes that because the soul "brings along" life, "the soul will never admit" death, since death is the opposite of life. As such, the soul must be "deathless."

Having made his final argument for the soul's immortality, Socrates tells his listeners what he thinks happens in the afterlife, explaining that the souls of pious people make their way to a "pure dwelling place" where they're unencumbered by bodies. Others will be "purified" for their wrongs until they're able to return to earth in a different body, and still others will be thrown into the worst reaches of the underworld, never to return.

Wrapping up his vision of the afterlife, Socrates drinks poison hemlock, walks around his cell to allow the poison to circulate through his body, then lies down as his friends weep. He tells them to stop, because there's nothing sad about his journey to the afterlife. Just before dying, he turns to his friend Crito and utters his last words: "Crito," he says, "we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Socrates – Socrates is a philosopher living in Athens, Greece in the fourth century BC He is the central character in *Phaedo*. A clever thinker and shrewd conversationalist, Socrates is known for encouraging people to carefully scrutinize their beliefs, often asking a series of simple questions to make his way toward a certain point. Using this method, he frequently shows other thinkers that their beliefs are founded upon logically unsound conclusions. This practice has gained him a number of enemies, which is why he's put on trial and sentenced to death in *Apology*. In *Phaedo*, Plato records Socrates's final hours, which the condemned philosopher spends with his friends. In the text, Phaedo recounts their conversation in full, explaining to Echecrates—whom he encounters after leaving the prison—that Socrates spent the final moments of his life discussing the immortality of the soul with fellow thinkers including Simmias, Cebes, and Crito. In Phaedo's account, Socrates tells his listeners that they shouldn't be sad about his imminent execution, since he has—as a philosopher—been preparing for death for his entire life. Insisting that there is a separation between the body and the soul, he frames death as an opportunity to finally leave behind the distractions of the corporeal world. This new opportunity will enable him to focus on the attainment of truth and wisdom, a pursuit to which he has devoted his whole life. As he walks his friends through his theories regarding immortality, he gladly addresses their objections, making it clear that he values the process of

intellectual inquiry more than anything. When he finally drinks the poison hemlock prepared for him by the jailer, he settles into death without reservation, urging his friends not to weep.

Phaedo – Phaedo is an ancient Greek philosopher and the narrator of *Phaedo*. On his way home after having witnessed Socrates's execution in an Athenian prison, Phaedo encounters a fellow philosopher, Echecrates, who asks him to tell him about Socrates's final hours. Phaedo tells Echecrates everything Socrates said, eventually admitting that he couldn't help but weep when his friend finally drank the poison hemlock.

Simmias – Simmias is an ancient Greek philosopher, and one of Socrates's devoted followers. Simmias is present in the final hours before Socrates's execution. Along with his friend Cebes, he is one of the primary participants in Socrates's last conversation, as he voices his various objections to Socrates's arguments regarding the immortality of the soul. For the most part, Simmias agrees with Socrates's logic, but nonetheless, he thinks of several counterarguments. When he appears hesitant to voice these thoughts, Socrates urges him to speak his mind, since his doubts will ultimately help the group get closer to the truth. By the end of the dialogue, Simmias is convinced by what Socrates says and believes that the soul is indeed immortal.

Cebes – Cebes is an ancient Greek philosopher, and one of Socrates's close followers. During Socrates's final conversation, Cebes—along with Simmias—voices several misgivings about Socrates's logic regarding the immortality of the soul. Although he's hesitant at first to outline his counterarguments, Socrates insists that he shouldn't hold anything back, since what matters most is that they work toward the truth together. Accordingly, Cebes speaks his mind, ultimately giving Socrates an opportunity to clarify and thus strengthen his arguments. In the end, Cebes is thoroughly convinced by what Socrates has to say.

Crito – Crito is an ancient Greek philosopher, and one of Socrates's close friends. Although he rarely speaks in *Phaedo*, Crito is present during Socrates's final hours. After Socrates drinks the poison hemlock, he turns to Crito and utters his last words, saying: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget." As noted in Hackett Publishing's 2011 edition of the text, "A cock was sacrificed to Asclepius [the god of medicine] by the sick people who slept in his temples, hoping for a cure. Socrates apparently means that death is a cure for the ills of life." As such, Socrates's final remark to Crito is both a sly joke and a reiteration of his acceptance of death.

Evenus – Evenus is an ancient Greek philosopher and poet. At the beginning of their discussion about death, Cebes tells Socrates that Evenus wants to know why he started writing poetry in prison. Socrates says that Cebes can tell Evenus that he started having a recurring dream that told him to "practice and cultivate the arts."

MINOR CHARACTERS

Echecrates – Echecrates is an ancient Greek philosopher from Pythagoras. When Phaedo encounters Echecrates on his way home from Athens, Echecrates asks him to tell him about Socrates's final hours, wanting to know what the famous philosopher talked about before his execution. This provides the impetus for Phaedo's entire narrative.

Anaxagoras – Anaxagoras is an ancient Greek philosopher who writes about the "natural sciences." Socrates notes that Anaxagoras suggests that "Mind" shapes the universe, an idea that Socrates admits he once believed. Now, however, he thinks Anaxagoras's theory ultimately depends too heavily on the physical senses.

THEMES

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IMMORTALITY, THE BODY, AND THE SOUL

Because *Phaedo* is an account of Socrates's final discussion before his execution, the majority of the dialogue is concerned with the notion of mortality. As friends and fellow philosophers Cebes, Crito, and Simmias crowd around Socrates, they express how sad they are that he's about to die. Socrates, however, is at peace, explaining that it would be foolish to mourn his death, which—he argues—is merely physical. He makes a distinction between the body and the soul, arguing that the body is inferior to the soul because it often leads a person astray with desire This is why intelligent philosophers like himself "free the soul from association with the body as much as possible." This theoretical separation between the body and soul allows Socrates to develop several arguments that prove—to his mind—that the soul is immortal. These arguments enable him to embrace his own death without hesitation, insisting to his friends that both he and they have nothing to worry about, for he has lived a virtuous life that has prepared him for what's to come. In turn, the points he makes about the soul's immortality suggest that the fear and bitterness most people feel at the end of their lives are actually unnecessary.

To prove the immortality of the soul, Socrates begins by defining death as nothing more than "the separation of the soul from the body." The body and the soul, he believes, are two different entities, and when one dies, these entities are finally disentangled. However, he complicates this point by saying that intelligent philosophers divest themselves from the whims of

the body, which they believe distract people from what matters most: the attainment of wisdom. "The philosopher more than other men frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible," Socrates asserts, saying that the senses often "deceive" a person and interfere with the soul's ability to "reason." He adds that intelligent people "approach" all things "with thought alone" because "the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom." Going on, he says, "[…] if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself." If this is the case, then only in death—in the lifting away from the body—can a person find true "wisdom," since the body will no longer be a distraction. Simply put, Socrates doesn't fear the prospect of death, because separating from his body will allow him for the first time to actually "acquire what has been [his] chief preoccupation" in life—namely, the attainment of knowledge and truth. In this way, he frames death not as a tragedy, but an opportunity.

Socrates's listeners agree with his reasoning, but not all of them are convinced that the soul is immortal. This is an important point, since the immortality of the soul is what allows Socrates to see death as something to embrace. To convince his friends that they need not worry about him, he outlines four arguments for the soul's immortality. First, he uses what's commonly referred to as The Cyclical Argument, upholding that "all things […] come to be […] from their opposites." This means that the living come from the dead, that the process of being (or *becoming*) alive "comes to be from being dead." If this is the case, then the soul lives on through each death and birth. Next, Socrates sets forth what's known as The Theory of Recollection, drawing upon the concept of learning he explains in his dialogue *Meno*—namely, that people don't acquire new knowledge, but simply recollect wisdom they've already learned in a past life (thereby implying that the soul is immortal). Socrates then makes The Affinity Argument, in which he suggests that the soul—unlike the body—shares properties with a certain kind of elevated existence that is noncorporeal and immortal, meaning that it too is deathless. Lastly, Socrates gives what's known as The Final Argument, which maintains that because something can never "admit its opposite" (i.e. cold cannot be cold if it is also hot), then the soul can never die, since the soul brings about life, and death is the opposite of life.

Using these four arguments, Socrates approaches his own death by minimizing the finality of death more generally. Taken together, the arguments enable Socrates and his friends to see his execution not as the tragic conclusion of his life, but as an inevitable—and even happy—transition away from corporeality.

It's worth noting that the way Socrates thinks about death in *Phaedo* differs from his approach in *Apology*. When he addresses the jury in *Apology*, he says he isn't afraid of execution because fearing death is the same thing as thinking oneself wise when one is not, since "no one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man." In keeping with this, he says that people should live "without a thought for death." In *Phaedo*, though, he actually thinks quite a lot about death. Philosophers and scholars attribute this discrepancy to Plato himself, who infused *Phaedo* with his own ideas but wrote *Apology* as a historical account of Socrates's specific beliefs. At the same time, though, Socrates does—in a certain way—acknowledge his new approach in *Phaedo*, prefacing his ruminations by saying that "it is perhaps most appropriate for one who is about to depart yonder to tell and examine tales about what we believe that journey to be like." With those words, readers see a somewhat transformed Socrates, a man on the verge of death who remains untroubled by his own mortality but is nonetheless newly curious about the nature of the afterlife. In turn, the dialogue that follows captures both Socrates's intellectual wonder regarding immortality and his willingness to embrace death, which he believes is nothing but a metaphysical transition.

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

In *Phaedo*, Socrates examines the nature of wisdom, using the process of learning to argue not only for the immortality of the soul, but also for the overall benefit of the life of the mind. Having drawn a clear distinction between the body and the soul, he says that philosophers prepare themselves for death by paying attention only to intellectual pursuits, which he asserts continue beyond death. Knowledge and wisdom, Socrates maintains, have the power to "purify" a person's soul upon death, and any good philosopher should aim to achieve this purification—which will only lead to the attainment of more wisdom and truth in the afterlife. Accordingly, he claims that one of the main goals of philosophers is to "prepare" for death, since this is how they will finally gain the knowledge they have been searching for all along. This viewpoint frames true wisdom as somewhat elusive in the realm of the living, since Socrates suggests that only in death will philosophers come upon the knowledge they have pursued in life. In order to make this happen, though, one must reach toward wisdom while still alive, purging oneself of corporeal distractions. As such, Socrates portrays the pursuit of knowledge in life as inherently worthwhile, even if true wisdom only comes with death.

It's important to understand that Socrates believes that body and soul are separate from one another. Taking this viewpoint, he devalues human sensory perception (such as sight and hearing) because he thinks corporeal methods of observation make it impossible to ever "grasp the truth." This, he maintains, is because "whenever [the soul] attempts to examine anything with the body, it is clearly deceived by it." Rather than depending upon the physical senses to gather knowledge,

Socrates believes "reasoning" is what gets a person closest to "the truth." When Socrates champions the process of "reasoning," he prioritizes intellectual thought above all else. The soul, he thinks, should immerse itself in a vacuum of philosophical analysis. By outlining this belief, he implies that the pursuit of knowledge ought to be a person's top priority in life.

What's more, Socrates focuses so intently on the attainment of knowledge because he believes it is intrinsically good. "With [wisdom] we have real courage and moderation and justice and, in a word, true virtue," he says. He argues that a knowledge-based approach to life, which concerns itself only with the attainment of wisdom, will help a person achieve "true virtue," adding that "wisdom itself is a kind of cleansing or purification." The "purification" of the soul that wisdom brings about is one of the main reasons Socrates values the life of the mind so much: he believes this "purification" determines one's fate in the afterlife. "Those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live in the future altogether without a body;" he says, adding that "they make their way to even more beautiful dwelling places" than those who don't devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge. In this way, readers see that Socrates's commitment to wisdom is wrapped up in his belief that philosophical thinking is rewarded in the afterlife. In turn, the attainment of knowledge isn't just a simple gathering of information, but a cultivation of "virtue" and the divine.

Socrates's investment in the connection between wisdom and the afterlife also emerges when he uses The Theory of Recollection to prove the soul's immortality. According to this theory (which Socrates also outlines in *Meno*), humans don't learn new information, but simply recollect knowledge the soul has already acquired in a past life. Socrates explains this by pointing out that his listeners understand certain concepts even without necessarily encountering actual manifestations of those concepts in real life. For instance, he says that Simmias grasps "the Equal" when he looks at two objects that are similar in size, even if those two objects aren't exactly the same. This, Socrates says, is proof that Simmias possesses a prior understanding of "the Equal," since he's able to "recollect" the concept of equality. In turn, this suggests that his soul contains a wealth of knowledge that it accumulated before Simmias was born—proof that it is, indeed, immortal. Once again, then, Socrates's approach to the attainment of knowledge influences his beliefs regarding the afterlife, thereby helping him underline why it's worth examining the nature of wisdom.

For all of Socrates's confidence, he nonetheless acknowledges that he might not be right about everything he says regarding the afterlife. After providing a lengthy description of the various paths souls take after death, he says, "No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places […]." Saying this, he admits that it's impossible to speculate about such unknowable matters. At the same time, though, his opinion that it's worth believing what he's said frames the very pursuit of knowledge as an innately noble one, especially since it might encourage a person to "seriously concern himself with the pleasures of learning." Ultimately, Socrates presents philosophical thought as a deeply worthwhile endeavor, even though a person won't encounter true wisdom until after death.

EXISTENCE, REALITY, AND THE FORMS

Socrates's primary goal in *Phaedo* is to prove the immortality of the soul, but in doing so he also meditates on the very nature of existence. As he examines what makes a thing the way it *is*, he formulates The Theory of Forms, an important philosophical concept regarding the overall essence of a given object or idea. The Theory of Forms is the complex—yet also deceptively simple—idea that there are certain Forms of reality that can only be defined in relation to themselves. For instance, something is big merely because it has the form of Bigness. As Socrates spells out this theory, he explains that he originally came upon it because he wanted to "know the causes of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes, and why it exists." It's clear, then, that his preoccupation with the soul's immortality is related to an even broader existential question, one that seeks to find the core reasons that things are the way they are. And though the Theory of Forms uses detailed logic and rhetoric to answer this question, it ultimately comes down to a rather basic understanding of reality: specifically, that something is the way it is because it accords with an unchanging property—a Form.

This simplicity is important, because Socrates insists that a person can't access the truth through the use of sensory perception. With all its distractions, desires, and eccentricities, he argues, the body only estranges people from reality. In turn, he discounts the powers of observation people rely upon most, thereby undermining the means by which the average person understands life and their surroundings. If, for instance, a person wanted to explain why something is beautiful, they would normally point to its aesthetic qualities, like its color or shape. But because these attributes are only observable through bodily sensation—in this case, through the use of sight—Socrates rejects this explanation, wanting instead to find a more definitive way of understanding the "cause" of the object's beauty. In this way, he seems to move away from actually pinpointing what makes a thing the way it is.

However, Socrates's unwillingness to go along with conventional, physical understandings of reality enables him to set forth The Theory of Forms, which allows for a more all-encompassing version of existence. Focusing on the foundational essence of any given thing, he says, "I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great

and all the rest." Thinking only about essential Forms, he says, "[…] if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything." To state this another way, he says, "[…] it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful." In other words, Beauty is a Form, and anything that is beautiful is that way because it partakes in that Form. Or, as Phaedo himself rephrases the idea, anything that "acquire[s]" the same name as a given Form does so only "by having a share in" that Form. Especially because Socrates claims that people can't perceive reality by using their senses, then the idea that they can turn to an immutable version of reality is quite significant. Through the Theory of Forms, Socrates arrives at a sense of certainty regarding existence, even as he rejects the common ways of understanding reality.

This idea might seem excessively circular and basic, but it's worth noting that it gives thinkers a way of accepting reality for what it is while still working within a logical, philosophical framework. Rather than having to trust corporeal methods of observation, which are fickle and prone to subjectivity, Socrates proposes a manner of thinking about reality that will always remain the same. In turn, he manages to build a sense of certitude surrounding the nature of existence, which would otherwise remain too vague and variable to characterize.

INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY, DISCUSSIONS, AND FRIENDSHIP

Because *Phaedo* is one of Plato's most conceptually rich Socratic dialogues, most readers focus primarily on the text's specific philosophical implications, but it's worth keeping in mind that it is also a snapshot of Socrates's final living moments. Surrounded by friends and fellow thinkers, he chooses to spend the remainder of his time doing what he has devoted his entire life to: seeking the truth through intellectual inquiry and discussion. This means engaging his devoted friends and followers in a lively back-and-forth regarding the soul, death, knowledge, and the nature of existence itself. As he does this, Socrates urges his interlocutors to voice whatever reservations they have about his theories, prioritizing the integrity of the discussion over his own beliefs. In this way, Plato portrays the respect Socrates has for the process of intellectual inquiry, demonstrating how committed he is to helping others explore sound arguments. Even on the verge of death, then, Socrates demonstrates that open discussion and intellectual discourse with valued friends are key components of being alive.

After Socrates outlines his first three arguments for the immortality of the soul, his friends and fellow thinkers Simmias and Cebes admit that, though they want to agree with his logic, they each have problems with certain aspects of his reasoning. Phaedo admits that he's "depressed" when he hears these objections, since he previously thought Socrates's arguments were perfect, and now he feels confused. In his retrospective account of this entire conversation, Phaedo tells Echecrates, "That [Socrates] had a reply [to Simmias's and Cebes's objections] was perhaps not strange. What I wondered at most in him was the pleasant, kind, and admiring way he received the young men's argument, and how sharply he was aware of the effect the discussion had on us, and then how well he healed our distress and, as it were, recalled us from our flight and defeat and turned us around to join him in the examination of their argument." Simply put, Socrates doesn't resent his friends' counterarguments, nor does he vehemently try to prove them wrong. Instead, he gladly "receive[s]" their misgivings and—with the kindness of a friend—thoroughly examines what they've said. As a result, it becomes clear how much Socrates appreciates the nature of friendly debate. Interested first and foremost in accessing the truth, he doesn't shy away from objections, instead inviting his listeners to engage with him in an intellectually robust dialogue. This, it seems, is the only way for a group of thinkers to come to definitive conclusions.

To illustrate his approach to rhetoric and the process of intellectual inquiry, Socrates tells his listeners that he doesn't want to become a "misologue," or someone who detests reason and debate. "There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse," he tells his friends, explaining why he's so open to hearing their qualms with his argument. This point also gives him a chance to show that he's *grateful* for Simmias's and Cebes's objections. He goes on to acknowledge the danger of confusing his listeners, which he believes might turn them into misologues and apathetic debaters who will be hesitant in the future to believe *any* argument. Accordingly, he's glad that Simmias and Cebes have voiced their reservations, since this ultimately encourages him to make his argument clearer. Once again, then, his respect for the truth and the value of dialogue above all else comes to the forefront of the text.

The context of this debate is also significant, since Socrates isn't only pontificating before his fellow thinkers; he's also bidding them farewell. Waiting to receive the **poison** he's been sentenced to drink, he spends the remainder of his life with a group of grief-stricken friends. However, he doesn't let sentimentality interfere with his never-ending pursuit of truth and wisdom. Sensing that some of his listeners are (unlike Simmias and Cebes) holding back objections to his arguments, he assures them, "I shall not be eager to get the agreement of those present that what I say is true, except incidentally, but I shall be very eager that I should myself be thoroughly convinced that things are so." Going on, he urges the listeners not to go easy on him, saying this will do them no good. "If you will take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth," he says. "If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose it with every argument and take care that in my eagerness I do not deceive myself and you […]." In turn, Socrates once more shows his friends that

what he wants above all else is to access the truth. What's more, he suggests that this is something he can only do in partnerships with his listeners, thereby framing the act of rhetorical discussion as a give-and-take process.

It is perhaps because of Socrates's relational approach to intellectual inquiry that Phaedo and the rest of his friends can't help but weep for their "comrade" when he finally drinks the poison. In turn, readers see the profound impact Socrates has had on the people around him, forging meaningful friendships through the crucially important process of philosophical discourse—a process to which he devotes himself right up until the very end of his life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE POISON

Although the majority of *Phaedo* focuses on Socrates's philosophical ideas rather than his coming death, the fact that he will soon be forced to drink poison hemlock hangs over the entire dialogue, and the poison itself comes becomes a symbol of the fact that he has given up his life in order to uphold his values. Even though he's about to die, Socrates sees no reason to "resent" or fear death, telling Crito to fetch the poison despite Crito's reminder that he doesn't need to drink it until sundown. In keeping with his willingness to die for his beliefs, Socrates also uses the poison to pour a "libation" to the gods, an act that symbolizes his unswerving piety and strong philosophical convictions—both of which remain uninfluenced by the (very immediate) prospect of death.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hackett edition of *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo* published in 2002.

Phaedo Quotes

❝ However, Cebes, this seems to me well expressed, that the gods are our guardians and that men are one of their possessions. Or do you not think so?

I do, said Cebes.

And would you not be angry if one of your possessions killed itself when you had not given any sign that you wished it to die, and if you had any punishment you could inflict, you would inflict it?

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Socrates explains to Cebes why a person shouldn't condone suicide. He provides this explanation because Cebes is confused about how, exactly, Socrates can embrace the idea of death while also scorning the act of suicide. This question arises because Socrates suggests that any truly intelligent philosopher ought not to fear death, since it is sometimes "better" to die than it is to live. Furthermore, this outlook aligns with his conviction that the soul is immortal and that those who have practiced philosophy will attain a superior and more "pure" existence through death, though he doesn't make these arguments clear until later in the dialogue. For now, Socrates simply says that a person should hope for death to come as soon as possible. However, he insists that one must not kill oneself, since humans are the "possessions" of the gods. As such, the gods would be "angry" if people killed themselves without permission. In this way, Socrates manages to show Cebes how he can hold two seemingly contradictory ideas at once—a rhetorical skill that is on full display later in the dialogue.

As for what you were saying, that philosophers should be willing and ready to die, that seems strange, Socrates, if what we said just now is reasonable, namely, that a god is our protector and that we are his possessions. It is not logical that the wisest of men should not resent leaving this service in which they are governed by the best of masters, the gods, for a wise man cannot believe that he will look after himself better when he is free. A foolish man might easily think so, that he must escape from his master; he would not reflect that one must not escape from a good master but stay with him as long as possible, because it would be foolish to escape. But the sensible man would want always to remain with one better than himself. So, Socrates, the opposite of what was said before is likely to be true; the wise would resent dying, whereas the foolish would rejoice at it.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates, Cebes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Cebes refutes Socrates's idea that intelligent philosophers ought to embrace death. Socrates has just told him that humans are the "possessions" of the gods, an argument he uses to explain why it's unacceptable for people to commit suicide (since doing so would be like stealing from the gods). Now, though, Cebes uses this point against him, saying that a truly "sensible man" should want to "remain" under the care of his beneficent masters—namely, the gods. By making this objection, Cebes reveals his belief in the finality of death, as he clearly thinks that the end of a person's time on earth also marks the end of that person's relationship with the gods. This, of course, is something Socrates will refute in the coming pages. In this way, Cebes's argument lays the groundwork for the entire text, giving Socrates an impetus to prove the immortality of the soul.

Simmias and Cebes, I should be wrong not to resent dying if I did not believe that I should go first to other wise and good gods, and then to men who have died and are better than men are here. Be assured that, as it is, I expect to join the company of good men. This last I would not altogether insist on, but if I insist on anything at all in these matters, it is that I shall come to gods who are very good masters. That is why I am not so resentful, because I have good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

After Cebes suggests that any "sensible man" should "resent" death because dying means leaving the care of the gods (who are benevolent and wise masters), Socrates speaks these words, revealing his belief that a "future awaits men after death." Here it becomes clear why, exactly, he doesn't fear the end of his life: he's confident that death doesn't mean he will cease to exist. Furthermore, he suggests that "good" people like himself have something to look forward to, whereas "wicked" people can expect a less exciting or pleasing existence. In turn, this conversation with Cebes sets the stage for Socrates's argument for the immortality of the soul, as he tries to show Cebes that death is nothing to be afraid of. Certain he's going to encounter not only "wise and good gods" but also other humans who are "better" than anyone in this life, Socrates eagerly accepts the fact that he's about to die.

Is the body an obstacle when one associates with it in the search for knowledge? I mean, for example, do men find any truth in sight or hearing, or are not even the poets forever telling us that we do not see or hear anything accurately, and surely if those two physical senses are not clear or precise, our other senses can hardly be accurate, as they are all inferior to these. Do you not think so?

I certainly do, he said.

When then, he asked, does the soul grasp the truth? For whenever it attempts to examine anything with the body, it is clearly deceived by it.

True.

Is it not in reasoning if anywhere that any reality becomes clear to the soul?

Yes.

And indeed the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, [...] when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

This back-and-forth exchange takes place between Socrates and Simmias as they discuss Socrates's distinction between the body and the soul. First, Socrates outlines why people can't depend upon their bodies to help them "search for knowledge," saying that the physical senses are "not clear or precise." Rather, they are subjective and constantly changing, which only gets in the way of the soul's ability to "grasp the truth." "For whenever [the soul] attempts to examine anything with the body, it is clearly deceived by it," Socrates says, ultimately suggesting that the body and soul can't work in conjunction with one another and still build an "accurate" conception of "reality." Consequently, he upholds that the only way to truly attain knowledge is to isolate the soul from the physical world, forcing it to "take leave from the body," thus sheltering it from the fickle whims of human sensory perception. This separation is important to note because it factors heavily into Socrates's view of death, which he thinks is nothing more than a more substantial separation of the soul from the body.

> It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself. It seems likely that we shall, only then, when we are dead, attain that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, namely, wisdom, as our argument shows, not while we live; for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death. Then and not before, the soul is by itself apart from the body.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Socrates expands upon his belief that the physical senses are unreliable. Believing that a person must try as hard as possible to isolate his or her soul from the body, he points out that death—which he sees as a literal separation between the body and the soul—provides a person with an opportunity to finally "attain" wisdom. After all, he argues, the body is constantly getting in the way of the soul's ability to acquire knowledge, distracting it with its unreliable sensory perceptions. Since death is the lifting away of the soul from the body, though, it gives a person a chance to pursue "pure knowledge" without the corporeal limitations usually placed upon the soul. If this *isn't* the case, he says, then one would have to believe that humans can *never* "attain knowledge." Of course, this is a pessimistic and unlikely stance, so Socrates concludes that the soul must find true wisdom after death. With this argument, he gives Simmias and Cebes yet another way of understanding why he doesn't resent or fear his coming death.

> [...] the only valid currency [...] is wisdom. With this we have real courage and moderation and justice and, in a word, true virtue, with wisdom, whether pleasures and fears and all such things be present or absent.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Socrates says this to Simmias and Cebes as a way of showing them why death is a positive experience for those who have led virtuous lives. After having explained in detail that the body and the soul are separate entities that become disentangled when a person dies, he suggests that the soul finally attains true "wisdom" in the afterlife, since it's no longer bogged down by the distractions of the body. In this passage, he takes this idea one step further, saying that "wisdom" is "the only valid currency" in the world, or the only thing worth focusing on. Trying to list the positive notions that come along with wisdom, he finally settles on the idea that wisdom is "true virtue." In turn, readers see that he is framing the soul's departure from the body not only as an opportunity to gain new knowledge, but also as an act that affords it a new kind of "currency," one that improves its existence on the whole.

Socrates, [Cebes] said, everything else you said is excellent, I think, but men find it very hard to believe what you said about the soul. They think that after it has left the body it no longer exists anywhere, but that it is destroyed and dissolved on the day the man dies, as soon as it leaves the body; and that, on leaving it, it is dispersed like breath or smoke, has flown away and gone and is no longer anything anywhere.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates, Cebes

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Cebes voices an objection to Socrates's argument that the soul is immortal. Socrates has just upheld that the souls of the living come from the souls of the dead. This proves that life comes from death, but Cebes points out that it doesn't prove that the soul necessarily continues to exist *after* a person dies. Instead, he calls upon a common belief regarding the soul, which is that it is impermanent and fleeting, something that perishes along with the death of the body. Framing the soul as something that "disperse[s] like breath or smoke" after a person dies, he challenges Socrates to prove that the soul is unchanging and indestructible. In turn, Cebes gives Socrates an opportunity to improve his argument, urging his friend and mentor to build upon what he's already said. Through this exchange, readers see the extent to which Socrates's followers appreciate the practice of philosophical discussion and the value of sound logic.

Let us examine it in some such a manner as this: whether the souls of men who have died exist in the underworld or not. We recall an ancient theory that souls arriving there come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead. If that is true, that the living come back from the dead, then surely our souls must exist there, for they could not come back if they did not exist, and this is a sufficient proof that these things are so if it truly appears that the living never come from any other source than from the dead. If this is not the case we should need another argument.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Socrates says this to Cebes after Cebes asks him to prove that the soul doesn't simply "disperse" after a person dies. Although he later advances more scrupulous and detailed arguments, Socrates begins in this passage by simply restating an "ancient theory." This theory suggests that human souls exist in the underworld. Interestingly enough, Socrates doesn't stop to interrogate this statement in the way that he normally investigates such claims. Instead of questioning the premises of this theory, he simply accepts not only that "souls must exist" in the underworld, but that there's an underworld in the first place. While this might seem out of character for somebody who's normally so focused on proving each and every claim, it's worth remembering that Socrates lived during a time in which it was quite uncommon to challenge the idea of the afterlife or underworld. In fact, one of the reasons Socrates was put on trial and imprisoned in the first place was because he was accused of impiety. Though he isn't actually guilty of impiety, this fact illustrates how seriously people in his culture oppose questioning of commonly held religious beliefs. In turn, Socrates and his friends take it for granted that there is an underworld and that souls exist within it, and the arguments he advances after making this assumption are more or less built upon this belief.

Of the two processes one is going to sleep, the other is waking up. Do you accept that, or not?

Certainly.

You tell me in the same way about life and death. Do you not say that to be dead is the opposite of being alive?

I do.

And they come to be from one another?

Yes.

What comes to be from being alive?

Being dead.

And what comes to be from being dead?

One must agree that it is being alive.

Then, Cebes, living creatures and things come to be from the dead?

So it appears, he said.

Then our souls exist in the underworld.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Socrates questions Cebes in order to show him that opposites come from one another. In fact, he has already established that this is the case, but now he adds yet another layer, saying that there are also opposite "processes" that come along with any pair of opposing realities. For example, being asleep is the opposite of being awake, and so the process of falling asleep is the opposite of awakening. Cebes agrees with this analogy, so Socrates applies it to the idea of mortality, saying that life and death are opposite. As such, "being dead" is the opposite of "being alive," and vice versa. Since Socrates has already established that things come to be from their opposites (as, for example, something gets taller from having been shorter before), he concludes here that "living creatures and things come to be from the dead." In turn, this conclusion allows him to assert with confidence that human souls "exist in the underworld," and readers see that he has used logic, meticulous reasoning, and active discussion to prove an otherwise religious assumption or belief.

> There is one excellent argument, said Cebes, namely that when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them. Then if one shows them a diagram or something else of that kind, this will show most clearly that such is the case.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates, Cebes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Cebes says this after hearing Socrates's first argument for the immortality of the soul. Socrates has just finished outlining what's known as The Cyclical Argument, which uses the idea of opposites to prove the soul's immortality. Now, though, Cebes remembers Socrates's ideas regarding learning, proposing that Socrates could also prove the immortality of the soul by using his Theory of Recollection. According to this theory, Cebes explains, humans are capable of accessing knowledge they were previously unaware they even had. This is because their souls "possess the knowledge," having acquired it in a previous life. When Cebes points out that a person can recover prior knowledge by looking at a "diagram," he references the dialogue Plato has in *Meno*, in which he draws a diagram in the sand in order to prove that a slave with no formal education is capable of answering questions about geometry. The fact that Cebes brings this up is a testament to how invested he is in this philosophical discussion, which has become a dialogue between Socrates and his fellow thinkers.

> Consider, he said, whether this is the case: We say that there is something that is equal. I do not mean a stick equal to a stick or a stone to a stone, or anything of that kind, but something else beyond all these, the Equal itself. Shall we say that this exists or not?
>
> Indeed we shall, by Zeus, said Simmias, most definitely.
>
> And do we know what this is? — Certainly.
>
> Whence have we acquired the knowledge of it? Is it not from the things we mentioned just now, from seeing sticks or stones or some other things that are equal we come to think of that other which is different from them? Or doesn't it seem to you to be different?

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Socrates makes his first reference to the existence of Forms, though he doesn't yet make his meaning explicit. In fact, what he says about the Forms actually has to do with his Theory of Recollection, as he builds upon his idea that the soul possesses a wealth of knowledge that it has collected throughout many lifetimes. In this moment, he asks Simmias to consider the notion of equality. When he goes out of his way to say that he doesn't mean "a stick equal to a stick or a stone to a stone," he urges Simmias to think of the entire *concept* of "the Equal itself," which is a Form, though he doesn't mention that here. Instead, Socrates simply asks Simmias how, exactly, he has an understanding of "the Equal." He asks this because he believes that—since the physical world is so unreliable—it's unlikely that Simmias has ever truly seen two objects that are exactly equal. And yet, Simmias grasps what it means for two things to be equal. "Is it not from the things we

mentioned just now, from seeing sticks or stones or some other things that are equal," he wonders, posing a rhetorical question, since he has already discounted this view of "the Equal." With this reasoning, he prepares to show Simmias that the soul possesses a previous understanding of the Form of the Equal—an understanding it acquired in a previous life.

Consider then, Cebes, whether it follows from all that has been said that the soul is most like the divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, always the same as itself, whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, soluble, and never consistently the same. Have we anything else to say to show, my dear Cebes, that this is not the case?

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Socrates has just restated his belief that the body does nothing but distract the soul from attaining true wisdom. This time, he has made this point by using what's known as The Affinity Argument, which effectively identifies two kinds of existence: the "visible" and "invisible." The soul, he says, belongs to the "invisible," and this means that it resembles "the divine." This is significant because that which is divine is "deathless" and immutable, "always the same as itself." Unlike the body, which is "visible" and thus "mortal" and constantly changing, the soul will never undergo any kind of substantial change, at least not insofar as it exists. Indeed, the body is "never consistently the same," but the soul will remain as it is for eternity, unaffected by the influence of the corporeal world. Once again, then, Socrates uses the distinction between the body and the soul to make an argument for immortality.

One might make the same argument about harmony, lyre and strings, that a harmony is something invisible, without body, beautiful and divine in the attuned lyre, whereas the lyre itself and its strings are physical, bodily, composite, earthy, and akin to what is mortal. Then if someone breaks the lyre, cuts or breaks the strings and then insists, using the same argument as you, that the harmony must still exist and is not destroyed because it would be impossible for the lyre and the strings, which are mortal, still to exist when the strings are broken, and for the harmony, which is akin and of the same nature as the divine and immortal, to be destroyed before that which is mortal; he would say that the harmony itself still must exist and that the wood and the strings must rot before the harmony can suffer.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates, Simmias

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Simmias voices his reservations regarding Socrates's arguments for the immortality of the soul. Socrates has already set forth The Cyclical Argument, The Theory of Recollection, and The Affinity Argument, but Simmias remains unconvinced. To express his concern, he uses an analogy, equating the relationship between the body and soul to that of a lyre and the music it makes. Simply put, an instrument cannot make music after it has been destroyed. If the soul is like a "harmony," then, it would be ridiculous to say that this harmony still exists after the very instrument that produces it has been destroyed. This, Simmias upholds, is effectively what Socrates has argued, since he has suggested that the soul doesn't perish along with the body. Simmias's objection is the first major argument Socrates has to confront in *Phaedo*. Although Cebes has already voiced several concerns, none of them is as thorough or challenging as this one, which forces Socrates to find a way to argue that something that depends on another thing can exist without that thing. Of course, it's worth noting that nobody suggested that the soul depends upon the body in the first place, but Simmias doesn't take this into account when formulating his analogy.

> Like Simmias, I too need an image, for I think this argument is much as if one said at the death of an old weaver that the man had not perished but was safe and sound somewhere, and offered as proof the fact that the cloak the old man had woven himself and was wearing was still sound and had not perished. If one was not convinced, he would be asked whether a man lasts longer than a cloak which is in use and being worn, and if the answer was that a man lasts much longer, this would be taken as proof that the man was definitely safe and sound, since the more temporary thing had not perished. But, Simmias, I do not think that is so, for consider what I say. Anybody could see that the man who said this was talking nonsense. That weaver had woven and worn out many such cloaks. He perished after many of them, but before the last. That does not mean that a man is inferior and weaker than a cloak. The image illustrates, I think, the relationship of the soul to the body

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates, Simmias, Cebes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

This is Cebes's objection to Socrates's assertion that the soul is immortal and indestructible. What he says is that the soul and body are like a weaver and his cloaks. In this example, the man is like the soul and the cloaks are like the many bodies that the soul inhabits throughout its (eternal) existence. Cebes says that the man outlasts his cloaks and fashions new ones, but it isn't the case that he will outlast *all* of them. Indeed, when he dies, he leaves behind a cloak that hasn't yet been worn out. Cebes says that it would be ridiculous to assume that since the man has always outlasted his cloaks in the past, the presence of his final cloak means he still exists. This, Cebes argues, is like saying that because the soul lasts for the lifetimes of many different bodies, it will last forever. His main objection isn't that the soul is capable of escaping death when the body inevitably dies, but that there's no proof that it won't *someday* perish along with one of its bodies. In other words, he accepts that the soul cycles through different bodies, but not that it's indestructible.

> It is as when one who lacks skill in arguments puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false—as sometimes it is and sometimes it is not—and so with another argument and then another. You know how those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument, but that all that exists simply fluctuates up and down […] and does not remain in the same place for any time at all.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Simmias, Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

After Simmias and Cebes tell Socrates their misgivings about his argument, he gives a short speech about how important it is to avoid "misology," or an aversion to reason and debate. Telling his listeners that they ought to avoid this kind of thinking, he examines the nature of philosophical debate, saying that people who "lack skill in arguments" will often trust one thing after another without fully understanding the various ideas. This, Socrates says, is a dangerous way to approach debate, for it might cause people to think that they are "very wise" when, in reality, all they are doing is advancing unsound rhetoric. The fact that he brings this up suggests that he wants to avoid setting forth theories for the sake of argument in and of itself. Rather, he wants to pursue the truth with his listeners, helping them (and himself) fully understand each idea. This is why he welcomes Simmias and Cebes's objections, since both of their perspectives have helped him identify the places in his own arguments where he hasn't been perfectly clear.

> I shall not be eager to get the agreement of those present that what I say is true, except incidentally, but I shall be very eager that I should myself be thoroughly convinced that things are so. […] If you will take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth. If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose it with every argument and take care that in my eagerness I do not deceive myself and you and, like a bee, leave my sting in you when I go.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Simmias, Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Socrates emphasizes how much he values Simmias and Cebes's willingness to voice their objections to his argument. Aware that his listeners might not want to challenge his ideas because they don't want to upset him during his final hours before death, he urges everyone present to come forth with their thoughts nonetheless. Indeed, he doesn't mind whether or not everyone is in "agreement" with him, at least not for superficial reasons. Rather, he wants to work together to attain wisdom, which is why he tells his friends not to think about him throughout the discussion, instead asking them to focus on "the truth." When he invites their criticism, readers see the deep respect he has for the process of philosophical discussion, a practice that overshadows everything else—even the fact that he's about to die.

But rather, Simmias, according to correct reasoning, no soul, if it is a harmony, will have any share of wickedness, for harmony is surely altogether this very thing, harmony, and would never share in disharmony.

It certainly would not.

Nor would a soul, being altogether this very thing, a soul, share in wickedness?

How could it, in view of what has been said?

So it follows from this argument that all the souls of all living creatures will be equally good, if souls are by nature equally this very thing, souls.

I think so, Socrates.

Does our argument seem right, he said, and does it seem that it should have come to this, if the hypothesis that the soul is a harmony was correct?

Not in any way, he said.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Simmias, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

This is a conversation that takes place between Socrates and Simmias when Socrates finally addresses Simmias's objection. Simmias has proposed that the soul is a "harmony," arguing that no harmony can exist after the instrument that produces it has been destroyed. This, Simmias believes, is an apt analogy for the relationship between the soul and the body. However, Socrates takes issue with the idea that the soul is a harmony. To prove that this isn't the case, he points out that "wickedness" is a disharmony. Since something can't be both itself and its opposite at the same time, a harmony cannot also be a disharmony. This means that if the soul were a harmony, it would not be able to possess any wickedness, since this would turn it into a disharmony. Obviously, though, not all souls are "equally good," since some do indeed possess wickedness. Through this line of reasoning, Socrates helps Simmias see that the soul cannot be a harmony, for there are many wicked souls.

[...] if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. [...] I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively, and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Socrates sets forth The Theory of Forms, in which he claims that things are the way they are simply because they adhere to certain unchanging and unquestionable Forms of existence or reality. "The Beautiful," for instance, is one of these Forms, meaning that

anything that is beautiful is simply that way because it is associated with the essential notion of beauty. This is a simultaneously simple and complex idea, but the most important thing to understand is that Socrates has found a way to explain the base nature of a thing without calling upon the physical senses, which he has already stated are unreliable and deceptive. He can't necessarily comment on "the precise nature of the relationship" between a thing and the Form to which it adheres, but he urges his listeners to accept the existential simplicity of his theory, saying that more "sophisticated" ways of trying to understand such ideas are ultimately misleading and confusing.

> You have bravely reminded us, but you do not understand the difference between what is said now and what was said then, which was that an opposite thing came from an opposite thing; now we say that the opposite itself could never become opposite to itself, neither that in us nor that in nature.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Socrates says this to an unnamed man who has just pointed out what he (the man) thinks is a flaw in Socrates's logic surrounding the nature of opposites. After listening to Socrates suggest that a thing can never remain itself while also becoming its opposite, this man reminds him that he previously said that things come to be *from* their opposites. If this is the case, the man wants to know, why is Socrates suddenly arguing that opposites don't define the nature of a thing? Socrates, for his part, kindly fields this question while also showing the man that he has misunderstood the two concepts, which are entirely separate. To explain this, he says that his previous assertion was that opposites *come* from one another. Now, though, he's saying that opposites can't *be* each other. For example, something that is cold can't *be* hot at the same time, but something can *become* cold (or at least colder) by having first been hot. In this way, Socrates demonstrates both his willingness to address his listeners' questions and his conviction that nothing can embody two contradictory states of existence at the same moment.

> Answer me then, he said, what is it that, present in a body, makes it living? —A soul.

And is that always so? — Of course.

Whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it? — It does.

Is there, or is there not, an opposite to life? — There is.

What is it? — Death.

So the soul will never admit the opposite of that which it brings along, as we agree from what has been said?

Most certainly, said Cebes.

[...]

Very well, what do we call that which does not admit death?

The deathless, he said.

Now the soul does not admit death? — No.

So the soul is deathless? — It is.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Cebes, Socrates

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation spells out one of the last rhetorical moves of Socrates's Final Argument for the immortality of the soul. He has already established with his listeners that a thing will never "admit" its opposite while still remaining itself. He has also shown that this is true of certain processes, meaning that anything that "brings along" (or causes) a certain thing will never "admit" "the opposite of that which it brings along." For instance, since fire always "brings" heat, it will never "admit" or share any properties with that which is cold while still existing as fire. Having asserted these premises, Socrates turns his attention to life, death, and the soul, showing that the soul "always brings life." As such, the soul will never "admit death," and this means it is "deathless." And if the soul is "deathless," this means it is immortal and indestructible.

> It is right to think then, gentlemen, that if the soul is immortal, it requires our care not only for the time we call our life, but for the sake of all time, and that one is in terrible danger if one does not give it that care. If death were escape from everything, it would be a great boon to the wicked to get rid of the body and of their wickedness together with their soul. But now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible, for the soul goes to the underworld possessing nothing but its education and upbringing, which are said to bring the greatest benefit or harm to the dead right at the beginning of the journey yonder.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

After proving the immortality of the soul, Socrates considers the implications of eternal existence. In this moment, he says that death could be seen as an "escape" for unvirtuous people if it weren't for the fact that the soul lives on. Since this is the case, though, there is no "escape from evil or salvation," and those who have lived "wicked" lives will have to face the consequences. He also suggests that a person's "education and upbringing" are the only things that have any sort of bearing on his or her time in the underworld. This, in turn, gives people an incentive to work toward being "as good and wise as possible" at the time of their death, since this is apparently the only thing that will determine the nature of their "journey yonder." As Socrates sets forth this notion, readers see that he has very specific ideas about the afterlife, allowing himself to speculate about such matters even after having spent hours trying to find the most logically sound reasoning to prove the immortality of the soul. In this way, it becomes clear once again that Socrates takes certain religious matters for granted, allowing them to mingle with his otherwise rigorous and investigative philosophical disposition.

> Those who are deemed to have committed great but curable crimes […] must of necessity be thrown into Tartarus, but a year later the current throws them out […]. After they have been carried along to the Acherusian lake, they cry out and shout, some for those they have killed, others for those they have maltreated, and calling them they then pray to them and beg them to allow them to step out into the lake and to receive them. If they persuade them, they do step out and their punishment comes to an end; if they do not, they are taken back into Tartarus and from there into the rivers, and this does not stop until they have persuaded those they have wronged […].

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Once Socrates finishes arguing for the immortality of the soul, he provides a lengthy description of the earth and the underworld. He goes into great detail about the shape of the earth and its many layers before giving a vivid portrait of the rivers running throughout the underworld. For the most part, this information is interesting but philosophically unimportant, at least when it comes to the ideas with which the rest of the text concerns itself. However, when Socrates describes what happens to people who have "committed great but curable crimes," he teases out the various implications that come along with the notion that the soul is immortal. In particular, the fate of those who have lived unvirtuous lives becomes something of a cautionary tale, since such people circle throughout the underworld with nothing to do but scream out in apology until they are forgiven. And yet, it's worth noting that there is a chance for them to eventually leave Tartarus, which ultimately explains why Socrates believes that everyone on earth possesses a soul that has come from the underworld—after all, he believes virtuous people don't come back as earthly humans, so it makes sense that he thinks these moderately wicked souls are eventually allowed out of Tartarus.

> No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale. That is the reason why a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom, and truth, and in that state awaits his journey to the underworld.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

As Socrates concludes his lengthy depiction of the underworld and its many terrors and delights, he admits that most likely, everything isn't exactly as he has described it. This willingness to admit his own ignorance aligns with his characteristic hesitancy to speculate about things about which he doesn't know for sure—a viewpoint he particularly champions in *Apology*, in which he argues that people shouldn't fear death because they don't know anything about it. Here, though, he dares to pontificate about the afterlife, but only because he thinks his vision of it promotes a positive way of life on earth. Realizing that he might be wrong about certain details, he nevertheless speaks openly about what he thinks happens after death, since he believes that he has "noble" ideas about the matter. Indeed, he thinks that his conception of the underworld will encourage people to "ignore the pleasures of the body" and to lead the life of a philosopher in pursuit of knowledge. After all, his overall message is that only people who have practiced "the pleasures of learning" will fare well after death. As such, his entire outlook gives people an extra incentive to lead what he believes is a virtuous life.

> "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget." — "It shall be done," said Crito, "tell us if there is anything else." But there was no answer.

Related Characters: Phaedo (speaker), Crito, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

This passage contains Socrates's last words. Uttering his final sentence, he asks Crito to make a sacrifice on his behalf to Asclepius. Asclepius is the Greek god of medicine and healing, and people in Ancient Greece used to make sacrifices to him in exchange for cures. The fact that Socrates asks Crito to do this for him suggests that he sees life as a disease or an illness, and death as the cure. Of course, this isn't necessarily all that surprising, since he has spent the majority of this dialogue demonstrating that the corporeal world is inferior to the incorporeal. Thinking that the body does nothing but get in the way of the soul's ability to attain true wisdom and knowledge, Socrates embraces death, which will finally rid him of his ties to the physical world. This, it seems, is why he likens his time on earth to an illness and his death to the final remedy.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PHAEDO

On his way back to Elis after witnessing Socrates's execution in Athens, Phaedo encounters Echecrates, who asks him to repeat what Socrates said before his death. He also wants to know why Socrates wasn't executed right away, bur rather spent time in prison awaiting his fate. In response, Phaedo explains that the Athenians have "vowed" to Apollo that they will send a ship to Delos and back every year. Until this "mission" is complete, Phaedo says, the city forbids any execution. The journey began the day before Socrates's trial, so the officials had to wait to execute him. Phaedo then tells Echecrates that even though he was "witnessing the death" of his friend, he "had no feeling of pity," since Socrates seemed content and ready to die a "noble" death. In keeping with the way he lived, he spent the final hours of his life in "philosophical discussion."

The conversation that takes place between Phaedo and Echecrates in this opening scene sets the stage for Socrates's final dialogue. The fact that Echecrates is so curious about what happened is a testament to Socrates's influence in Greece, as philosophers yearn to know not only about the particulars of his death, but about his final thoughts. As such, Phaedo himself becomes a mouthpiece for the revered philosopher's last words. In this initial exchange, readers learn that Socrates has been in prison for quite some time, meaning he's had ample time to carry out philosophical discussions with his peers, who visit him regularly. What's more, the personal drama of this dialogue comes to the forefront of the text, as Phaedo mentions his relationship with Socrates—a reminder that Phaedo and his fellow philosophers have just lost a confidante, mentor, and friend.

Phaedo begins his account of Socrates's final hours. Along with a group of friends—including Crito, Cebes, and Simmias—he spends time in Socrates's cell. Plato, he notes, is absent because he's "ill." Phaedo and his friends have gotten used to visiting Socrates, but on this particular morning they're informed that he'll be executed. Entering his cell, they find his wife crying next to him while holding their baby, though Socrates sends her away. He has recently been freed from his "bonds," so he rubs his wrists and notes that Aesop (the famous fable writer) should have written about the relationship between pleasure and pain. This comment reminds Cebes that the poet Evenus wanted him to ask Socrates why he started writing poetry in this late stage of life, and Socrates says that it's because a god told him in a dream to "practice and cultivate the arts."

When Phaedo says that Plato was absent for Socrates's final hours, readers understand that this account may not be very historically accurate, since Plato—the author himself—wasn't actually present for the exchange. By highlighting this, Plato gives himself license to infuse the dialogue with some of his own philosophical ideas. This sheds light on some of the discrepancies between what Socrates says in Phaedo *and what he says in other dialogues. Unlike* Apology, *for instance,* Phaedo *isn't presented as a historical document, but rather as a somewhat fictionalized version of what happened before Socrates's death. On another note, it's worth mentioning that Socrates's sudden interest in "the arts" aligns with his belief (outlined in other dialogues) in the pursuit of wisdom. Although he has spent his life thinking that philosophy is the only worthy occupation, he now decides to explore poetry as a way of accessing new kinds of knowledge.*

Socrates tells Cebes to say goodbye to Evenus for him, adding, "Tell him, if he is wise, to follow me as soon as possible." This comment strikes Simmias as strange, so he asks Socrates why he would encourage Evenus to hasten toward death. In response, Socrates says that Evenus is a philosopher and that any good philosopher should welcome death. This, however, doesn't mean Evenus should kill himself, since this isn't "right." Hearing this, Cebes wonders how a philosopher can avoid suicide while also welcoming death. To answer this, Socrates asserts that it is sometimes "better" for a person "to die than to live." However, a person doesn't deserve to decide when he or she dies, since people are the "possessions" of the gods. Accordingly, "one should not kill oneself" unless a god shows that it is necessary to do so.

Given that this is Socrates's final conversation, it's unsurprising that it quickly turns to the matter of death. Socrates suggests that good philosophers ought not fear death, though they also shouldn't kill themselves because doing so wouldn't be "right." His reasoning rests on the belief that people belong to the gods, a notion that underlines not only his respect for the deities, but also the ways in which he often combines philosophical logic with spiritual belief—a tendency that will bring itself to bear on the arguments he makes throughout Phaedo.

Cebes agrees with Socrates's point about suicide, but has trouble accepting the idea that a philosopher should embrace death. After all, if the gods are wise "masters" of humans, it would be foolish for a person to want to leave their care. Instead, Cebes says, intelligent philosophers ought to "resent dying." After Cebes makes this point, Simmias chimes in, saying that this issue is relevant to Socrates's current situation, since he is apparently so untroubled by his coming death. Addressing this, Socrates says that he believes he'll encounter an even "better future" when he dies, a future in which he'll encounter more "wise and good gods" and humans who are even "better" than the ones that exist the realm of the living.

To assure his friends that he has nothing to fear, Socrates suggests that his death isn't as final as they might think. Rather than leaving the care of the gods, he believes he'll actually be getting closer to these benevolent "masters," ultimately implying that his existence isn't coming to an end. What's interesting about this idea is that it differs from the argument he sets forth in Apology. *In both cases, he states that people shouldn't fear death, but in* Apology *he says that to fear death is to make an unfounded assumption about the afterlife. According to this line of thinking, fearing death is like thinking oneself wise when one is not. Now, though, Socrates doesn't hold back from speculation. This slight discrepancy is an indicator that Plato has infused* Phaedo *with some of his own ideas about the afterlife.*

Simmias asks Socrates to explain why, exactly, he thinks a "better future" awaits him after death. Before he answers this, though, Socrates asks Crito what's troubling him, and his friend says that the man mixing **the poison** for Socrates's execution told him to inform Socrates that he shouldn't talk too much. This, he claims, is because "people get heated when they talk," and this decreases the efficacy of the poison, making it necessary for the condemned to drink extra portions. Casting this worry aside, Socrates insists that he doesn't mind having to drink the hemlock two or three times, saying that what he really wants is to focus on answering Simmias's question about the afterlife.

Socrates's lack of concern regarding his physical well-being is indicative of his philosophical beliefs. Above all, he wants to pursue the process of intellectual inquiry, casting aside all worry regarding his death. Of course, he will no doubt be in much more physical pain if he has to drink multiple servings of hemlock, but this doesn't matter to him because he doesn't care about such superficial matters. This moment foreshadows Socrates's beliefs regarding the difference between the body and the soul.

Turning to Simmias and Cebes, Socrates says that "the one aim of those who practice philosophy" is to "practice for dying and death." To explain this, he gets Simmias to agree that death is nothing but "the separation of the soul from the body." He then says that philosophers ought not to pay attention to the whims and desires of the body, since they should focus on the soul. Indeed, he upholds that the good philosopher "frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible." This is because the physical senses are unreliable when it comes to "acquiring" wisdom or knowledge. Socrates argues that the soul only ever "grasp[s] the truth" when it acts independently of the body, "when it is most by itself" and thus uninfluenced by physical senses.

Once Socrates sets forth his belief that the body and soul are separate entities, he frames the body as inferior. This, it seems, is why he doesn't care whether or not he has to drink multiple doses of hemlock—to him, the body is unimportant, so it means nothing to him if he has to undergo the pain of drinking more poison. What he's really interested in, he says, is the soul, which he thinks separates itself from the body after death. As Socrates outlines this argument, he prepares to explain to his listeners why he thinks that a "better future" awaits him. Furthermore, he champions the practice of philosophy by speaking admiringly about philosophers who "practice for dying and death" by disregarding the unreliable aspects of the corporeal world.

Socrates asks Simmias to consider whether "there is such a thing as the Just itself," or "the Beautiful," or "the Good." Simmias agrees that these and many other ideas exist, and Socrates adds that they capture the "reality" of what each thing "essentially is." Going on, he posits that the best way to understand these realities is not to use the bodily senses to grasp them, but to use "pure thought alone." This is because "the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom."

As Socrates solidifies the distinctions between the soul and the body, he refers to the Forms, or the notion that there are certain ideas (like "the Beautiful" or "the Good") that encapsulate essential "realities." The Forms, he argues, can only be understood by the soul, not by the body, which is fickle and unreliable with its tendency to make observations based on superficial physical stimuli. Although he doesn't fully explain the concept of Forms in this moment, this serves as a precursor to his in-depth examination of the idea, which appears later in the dialogue.

Since the body is constantly present in life, Socrates notes that only in death will philosophers be able to attain true wisdom, since the body and soul will no longer be entangled with one another. To state this another way, he says, "Either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death. Then and not before, the soul is by itself apart from the body." However, he claims that humans still ought to try during life to live uninfluenced by the unreliable corporeal world. This kind of behavior, he believes, will help people "purify" themselves "until the god himself frees" them. In turn, he says that in death he'll finally be able to "acquire" the wisdom and knowledge he's been after for his entire life.

Socrates believes that the body and soul are separate, and he also believes that the soul disentangles itself from the body when a person dies. Furthermore, he sees this as a good thing, since he thinks the body only gets in the way of a person's ability to "attain knowledge." This is why he looks forward to a "better future" after death, happy that he'll finally be able to rid himself of pesky physical distractions. At the same time, Socrates has also lived his entire life trying not to pay attention to the corporeal world, instead applying himself to philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom. In turn, he believes that he'll be ready to finally part from the physical world when the time comes.

Socrates reiterates the fact that good philosophers try their best to separate themselves during life from their bodies in order to attain knowledge. This, he claims, is an act of "purification," one that will only be complete when a person dies and is finally fully released from the corporeal world. In this way, practicing philosophy is like preparing for death, and it would be foolish for someone to prepare for death and then "resent it when it comes." Consequently, he gladly embraces his imminent execution. What's more, he welcomes death because it will enable him to pursue wisdom, which he says is the same as "true virtue."

Again, Socrates's reasons for embracing death become clear, as he insists that his execution will give him the opportunity to more thoroughly apply himself to philosophy and the pursuit of knowledge. Without the body to distract him, he will be "purified" and thus better able to focus on the attainment of wisdom, which he sees as an inherently virtuous task.

Socrates's listeners now understand why he doesn't fear death, but Cebes can't help but voice his hesitation regarding the idea that the soul attains "true virtue" after death. He points out that most people think the soul is "destroyed" after death, "dispers[ing] like breath or smoke." In turn, he urges Socrates to provide an argument proving that the soul doesn't simply disappear when a person dies.

Cebes's objection to Socrates is worth noting because it reminds readers not to simply take whatever the philosopher says at face value. Although Socrates is a meticulous debater, it's true that he hasn't yet sufficiently proved the immortality of the soul. Rather, he has taken it as a given that the soul exists after death, focusing instead on how the final separation from the physical world will enable him to attain true knowledge. By urging his friend to develop his argument more fully, Cebes turns the dialogue into a give-and-take discussion, pushing Socrates to more carefully outline his viewpoint and thus create a more persuasive argument.

To prove the immortality of the soul, Socrates says, "Let us examine it in some such a manner as this: whether the souls of men who have died exist in the underworld or not." Going on, he says, "We recall an ancient theory that souls arriving [in the underworld] come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead." If it is indeed the case that living souls come from the dead, he says, then it "truly appears that the living never come from any other source than from the dead."

Socrates bases his first argument for the immortality of the soul on an old idea that the souls of people who have died "exist in the underworld." This, of course, assumes a belief in the underworld itself, a point Socrates doesn't challenge or feel the need to prove. Once again, then, readers see the ways in which he combines his philosophical ideas with his spiritual beliefs—beliefs that were rarely (if ever) questioned in Ancient Greece. It makes sense, then, that Socrates would use this premise as a starting point, and it's worth noting that the logic following this assumption is sound and well-argued. As he outlines his theory, he attempts to prove not that the underworld exists, but that souls *exist within it (and come back to life from it).*

Cebes agrees that, by Socrates's logic, "the living" always come from "the dead." Taking this idea a step further, then, Socrates says that all things are this way: anything in existence comes from its opposite. For instance, something becomes "smaller" from having been "larger" before. Similarly, "the weaker comes to be from the stronger, and the swifter from the slower." Having spelled this out, Socrates adds that two opposites come from one another by way of opposite "processes," so that the transformation from "larger" to "smaller" happens via "decrease," whereas the transformation from "smaller" to "larger" happens via "increase." Using this logic, Socrates gets Cebes to state that "being alive" comes from "being dead," since they are opposites. "Then, Cebes, living creatures and things come to be from the dead?" he asks, and Cebes agrees. "Then our souls exist in the underworld," Socrates concludes.

The idea Socrates sets forth in this moment is known as The Cyclical Argument, and its basic underlying idea is that since all things come to be from their opposites (as something becomes "taller" from having been "smaller" before), then living souls must come from the souls of people who have already died, since it has already been agreed upon that life and death are opposites. This, in turn, helps Socrates argue that human souls "exist in the underworld"—an important point, given that he's trying to prove the immortality of the soul. Indeed, if the soul is truly immortal, then it must exist after the death of the body, and this existence would, of course, take place in the underworld.

Having shown that souls "exist in the underworld," Socrates notes that "processes of becoming" (in this case, dying and coming to life) must "balance each other" out. Otherwise, everyone would eventually be "absorbed" by death. To illustrate this point, he asks Cebes to consider what it would be like if there were no opposite process to match that of falling asleep. If this were the case, he explains, everyone would be eternally asleep. Cebes accepts this example and confirms that he now believes that the processes of dying and coming to life are balanced, thus implying that the soul doesn't die, but simply circles through death and life.

The notion that "processes of becoming" must "balance each other out" helps Socrates complete The Cyclical Argument. It enables him not only to show Cebes that souls exist in the underworld, but to prove that the process of coming alive and dying will always repeat itself. This, in turn, aligns with his idea that the soul is immortal, as he frames its existence as cyclical and never-ending.

Cebes realizes Socrates could also argue for the soul's immortality by using his theory of "recollection." When he says this, Simmias admits that he doesn't remember this idea, so Cebes explains it by saying, "[…] when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside of them." Expanding upon this, Socrates says that "learning is recollection." Going on, he asks Simmias to consider the fact that when people look at something, they often are reminded of something else. For instance, Simmias might look at two objects of similar size and call to mind the idea of "the Equal." That is, even if the objects aren't exactly the same size, he "recollects" the idea of equality, proving that he previously "possess[ed] knowledge of the Equal."

Socrates's ideas about the attainment of knowledge and wisdom lead to the second argument for the soul's immortality, which is commonly known as The Theory of Recollection. Socrates has already spoken about this idea in Meno, proving that people don't learn new knowledge, but simply "recollect" the knowledge their souls acquired before birth. This, of course, means that the soul exists before birth, which is why the theory is useful for proving immortality. In this dialogue, though, Socrates goes beyond what he says in Meno, combining The Theory of Recollection with his ideas about the Forms. To illustrate the fact that humans possess knowledge that they themselves didn't learn in their own lives, he shows Simmias that he understands the Form of equality, a concept his soul grasps without his having to learn the idea. In this way, Socrates once again prepares his listeners to think about the Forms, which he addresses in more detail later in the dialogue.

Simmias is convinced that the soul exists before birth. However, he urges Socrates to prove that it *continues* to exist after death, which he thinks Socrates hasn't yet properly supported with sound rhetoric. Socrates, for his part, thinks he actually *has* proved this, but he indulges Simmias because he recognizes that he and Cebes are still afraid that the soul will simply "dissolve and scatter" after death. He begins his next argument, saying that the only kind of thing that is "likely to be scattered" is that which is "composite and a compound by nature." Composites, he says, can be "split up into" different parts, whereas "noncomposites" will always remain the same. Things like "the Equal" or "the Beautiful" are noncomposites, for they can never be anything other than what they are. Things in the corporeal world, on the other hand, are composite and thus subject to change.

When Simmias asks Socrates to explicitly prove the continued existence of the soul, readers see once again the nature of this philosophical discourse, in which Socrates's peers implore him to make himself as clear as possible and Socrates strengthens his argument in response. In this case, his friends' concerns prompt Socrates to present his third argument for the immortality of the soul, which is known as The Affinity Argument. In keeping with Socrates's ideas regarding the unreliability of the physical world, this argument suggests that the things that make up the corporeal world are "composites" (things made up of multiple pieces) that are always changing. The Forms, on the other hand, are entities in and of themselves, meaning that they are "noncomposite" and thus unchanging. This is only part of the first premise of The Affinity Argument, but it's already clear that Socrates is once again making use of the idea of Forms to outline his views regarding existence and reality.

Socrates makes a distinction between that which is visible and that which is invisible, saying that composite, changeable things are visible and noncomposite, immutable things are invisible. In other words, things in the corporeal world—humans and "clothing," for instance—are visible, whereas things like "the Equal" or "the Beautiful" are invisible. The soul, Socrates gets Cebes to remark, is invisible. What's more, it has already been determined that "when the soul investigates [something] by itself it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging." This kind of existence "resembles the divine." As such, the soul itself is "most like" that which is "divine" and "deathless," "whereas the body is most like that which is human [and] mortal."

To put The Affinity Argument more simply, what Socrates is effectively saying is that there's a certain kind of existence that "resembles the divine." Because the soul itself aligns with this kind of existence, then it too "resembles the divine." This is an important point, since anything that shares properties with the divine must also share its immortality.

Continuing, Socrates says that because the soul belongs to the "invisible" and "noncomposite" category of existence, it cannot be broken up or changed. This, in turn, means that it won't simply "dissolve" or disappear when the body dies. Moving on from this point, Socrates says that if a soul is "pure" when it exits the body, it will achieve a "divine" existence amongst the gods. If, however, a person has not pursued philosophy to separate the soul from the body as much as possible during life, then his or her soul is "impure" and will thus go to the nether reaches of the underworld before coming back to life in an inferior bodily form.

Solidifying The Affinity Argument, Socrates emphasizes the fact that nothing that is unchangeable can "dissolve" or disappear, since this would require it to change. Because it's noncomposite and invisible, the soul is unchangeable. As such, it will not "dissolve" or disappear after death. After having established the immortality of the soul (though he will later present a final argument), Socrates suggests not only that the soul exists for eternity, but that its destination depends upon how a person has lived his or her life. In this way, he once again combines his logical reasoning with his more general—spiritual—ideas regarding the afterlife.

After Socrates finishes his most recent argument for the immortality of the soul, Simmias and Cebes confer with one another, eventually admitting that they have qualms about his theories. However, they're hesitant to voice these objections, since Socrates will soon be executed and they don't want to further upset him. Hearing this, Socrates only laughs, telling them once again that he isn't upset about his imminent death. Taking him at his word, Simmias outlines his concern, pointing out that a person could counter Socrates's argument for the immortality of the soul by referencing the harmony made by a lyre and its strings. Like the soul, the harmony is invisible, whereas the lyre—much like the body—is visible. However, if one were to break the lyre and its strings, the harmony would cease to exist, suggesting that Socrates's view of the relationship between corporeal and incorporeal entities is flawed.

Socrates's willingness to hear Simmias and Cebes's misgivings about his argument proves once again that he values the process of intellectual inquiry more than he cares about being right. Wanting to find the truth, he welcomes their objections. Simmias's argument is a good one, for it puts Socrates's otherwise confusing concepts into a more tangible framework, one that might help Simmias and the others more easily grasp the relationship between the body and the soul.

When Simmias finishes his analogy, Socrates asks Cebes to voice his own objection. Cebes says that, although Socrates's logic has been convincing, he still has a hard time believing that the soul lasts forever. To illustrate this, he gives an example, asking Socrates to imagine a weaver. In this example, the weaver fashions a cloak, and when it wears out, he makes a new one. He does this for his entire life. However, when he's quite old, he weaves a new cloak and then dies. As a result, this cloak outlasts him. "That does not mean that a man is inferior and weaker than a cloak," Cebes says, adding that this analogy mirrors the relationship between the body and the soul. Just because the soul lives after the death of the body, he argues, that doesn't mean it will live *forever*.

Like Simmias, Cebes is concerned with the relationship between the body and the soul, specifically taking issue with the fact that Socrates has implied that the soul lasts forever simply because it lasts longer than the body. Whereas Simmias's objection is that the soul cannot exist without the body, Cebes's argument is that the resilience of the soul doesn't automatically prove its indestructibility.

Phaedo admits to Echecrates that he and his fellow philosophers were "depressed" after Simmias and Cebes voiced their objections, since they were previously so convinced of Socrates's logic, but were then plunged into confusion. However, he was astonished by the way Socrates answered. "What I wondered at most in him was the pleasant, kind, and admiring way he received the young men's argument," Phaedo says.

Once more, Socrates shows his willingness to engage in friendly debate. Rather than angrily rejecting Simmias and Cebes's arguments, he welcomes their objections, "admiring" them for speaking up. Here, as elsewhere, Socrates encourages his peers to pursue a dynamic discourse, clearly wanting them to seek the truth above all else.

Resuming his narration, Phaedo explains that Socrates warns his listeners about the danger of becoming "misologues," or people who "hate reasonable discourse." If he confuses them too much, he says, he might instill in them a distaste for intellectual discussion, turning them into apathetic debaters who are loath to believe *anything*. In contrast, Socrates welcomes Simmias and Cebes's counterarguments, since they give him a chance to clarify what he means. In keeping with this, he assures his listeners that he's uninterested in getting them to agree with him. What he really hopes to achieve is the truth, so he encourages anyone present to speak up if they find a flaw in his logic.

Again, Socrates demonstrates his commitment to finding the truth, something he hopes to do through levelheaded debate and intellectual inquiry. What's more, he doesn't assume that he already knows the truth for certain; he can only become sure of it through talking with others. In this moment, Socrates also recognizes that he often confounds the people he talks with, which is why he insists that anyone who is confused shouldn't hesitate to speak up. As a proponent of philosophical discourse, he doesn't want to frustrate his fellow thinkers, for this would do nothing to help them attain wisdom.

First, Socrates addresses Simmias's idea that the soul is a harmony. He quickly disproves this by pointing out that Simmias previously agreed that all learning is recollection, which means that the soul acquires knowledge before birth. Because of this, the soul can't be a harmony produced by and in conjunction with the body, since it existed *before* the body. Indeed, claiming that the soul is a harmony would be like saying that the music an instrument makes existed before the instrument itself was built. Committing himself once again to The Theory of Recollection, Simmias withdraws his objection.

Simmias's original objection focuses mainly on what happens when a person dies. As such, he forgets to consider what happens before birth. Since he has already committed himself to the idea that the soul exists before birth (as proved by The Theory of Recollection), he renders his own argument illogical, realizing that what he's said is like suggesting that music can exist without a musical instrument to make it.

Despite the fact that he has already convinced Simmias that the soul isn't a harmony, Socrates provides another argument. He upholds that one soul can't be more of a soul than another, though harmonies can have varying degrees of harmoniousness. What's more, Socrates says that "wickedness" is a kind of "disharmony." This means that if the soul is a harmony, it can't be wicked, since wickedness would make it disharmonious. And if a soul can never be wicked, that must mean that all souls are good. But this is clearly not the case, since there are indeed people with unvirtuous souls. For this reason, the soul can't be a harmony. Furthermore, Socrates shows that the soul and body don't constitute a harmony, since this would require them to always align with one another. In reality, the soul constantly "opposes" the body, forcing it to ignore its desires.

Socrates's assertion that a harmony can't also be a disharmony at the same time serves as a precursor to his final argument for the immortality of the soul, which heavily depends upon the idea that something can't be both itself and its opposite simultaneously. This notion has to do with his Theory of Forms. In this moment, then, he once again prepares his listeners to examine the Forms and the essential nature of existence.

Having given Simmias three good reasons to discount the idea that the soul is a harmony, Socrates addresses Cebes's concern that just because the soul outlives the body doesn't mean it's immortal. To formulate a satisfactory response, Socrates says the group must consider "the cause of generation and destruction." He explains that he used to be interested in "natural science," wanting to know "the causes of everything." When he tried to study why things are the way they are, though, he only further confused himself, as he suddenly doubted everything he previously took for granted. To this day, he remains unwilling to say that he understands why one and one make two, not knowing how, exactly, to grasp the process. He has, however, formulated a "new method of investigation," one that helps him avoid these problems.

By inviting his listeners to experience confusion regarding the underpinnings of the natural world, Socrates prepares them to question why, exactly, things are the way they are. In turn, he paves the way for his last argument for the immortality of the soul, which is known as The Final Argument—an argument that encourages thinkers to scrutinize the very nature of existence in a fashion that has nothing to do with physical observation.

Explaining his "new method of investigation," Socrates says he came across the teachings of Anaxagoras, who believes that the Mind "directs and is the cause of everything." This, Socrates says, seemed reasonable to him, and he adopted the subsequent notion that the Mind would "direct everything and arrange each thing in the way that was best." He took this to mean that a person need only discover "the best way" for a thing to be in order to understand its "cause." However, Socrates's excitement soon dwindled when he realized that Anaxagoras determined what was "best" for a thing by relying on the physical senses and the visible world. At that point, Socrates knew he had figure out for himself why things are the way they are.

When Socrates uses the word "cause," he is referring to that which makes a thing what it is. He doesn't necessarily justify why, exactly, he thinks that the Mind will "direct everything and arrange each thing in the way that [is] best," but this particular detail is quickly made irrelevant by the fact that he discounts Anaxagoras as a thinker altogether. Searching for a way to conceptualize reality, then, he's desperate to think of a way to understand the "cause" of things without relying on physical observation.

"I am going to try to show you the kind of cause with which I have concerned myself," Socrates says. To begin, he considers the essential idea of something, using Beauty as an example. "[…] If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything," he says. To put this another way, "all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful." Similarly, "it is through Bigness that big things are big."

At this point, Socrates finally unveils what's known as The Theory of Forms, a philosophical argument that Plato revisits in many of his texts. Explaining that "all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful," he effectively avoids having to point to specific physical attributes to describe why something is the way it is. Instead, he suggests that a thing is the way it is simply because it partakes in a certain Form of existence or reality. "Bigness," for instance, is a Form, so anything that is big is big because of Bigness.

Phaedo tells Echecrates that everyone present "agreed that each of the Forms existed." Resuming his narration, he says that Socrates calls attention to the fact that Simmias is taller than Socrates himself but shorter than Phaedo. Simmias, Socrates says, is taller than Socrates not because it is "the nature of Simmias to be taller than Socrates," but because "of the tallness he happens to have." Similarly, Simmias is shorter than Phaedo simply because of "the shortness" Simmias has. However, if Simmias is at one time shorter and at another time taller, he would seem to have both shortness and tallness. But he is never both tall and short at the same time, because "Tallness itself is never willing to be tall and short at the same time." As such, Socrates determines that tallness either "flees and retreats whenever its opposite, the short, approaches, or it is destroyed by its approach."

In this moment, Socrates makes an important distinction about the nature of opposites. Whereas he has previously argued that things come to be *from their opposites, now he suggests that something cannot be both itself and its opposite at the same time. Whenever a thing's opposite brings itself to bear on that thing, the thing will cease to be what it was before. This is worth keeping in mind as the dialogue progresses, since Socrates leans heavily on this new approach to the idea of opposites.*

Continuing his final argument for the immortality of the soul, Socrates proposes that a Form can never admit its opposite—neither Tallness nor anything else can "become" its opposite "while still being what it was." Responding to this, one of the men listening remarks that Socrates has already suggested that things come to be from their opposites. Socrates notes that he did indeed say this, but he asserts that the listener misunderstands him. Whereas before he said that a thing *becomes* itself by way of its opposite, now he says that a thing cannot *remain* itself while also embodying its opposite. In other words, "an opposite will never be opposite to itself."

This unnamed listener's objection gives Socrates a chance to clarify the distinction between The Cyclical Argument and what he's now saying about the nature of opposites. In the Cyclical Argument, he uses opposites to show where things come from, whereas now he is solely concerned with looking at the exact nature of a thing at one time. *As such, he does not contradict himself, because the idea of a thing coming from its opposite doesn't affect whether or not a thing can be both itself and its opposite* at the same time *(which, of course, Socrates says it can't).*


To exemplify what he means by the fact that something can never "be opposite to itself," Socrates asks his listeners to consider "hot" and "cold." These are not, he says, the same thing as "fire" and "snow," even if fire is hot and snow is cold. "Snow will not admit the hot," he says, "but when the hot approaches it will either retreat before it or be destroyed." As such, it's clear that, in the same way that something can't be itself while also being its opposite, things that are defined by a certain Form (the Hot or the Cold, for instance) will always have the "character" of that Form. Snow, then, will cease to be snow if it doesn't align with the Cold. Put another way, snow will always "bring" the Cold, which means snow can never "bring" the Hot without ceasing to be snow.

The idea of opposites never "admit[ting]" one another is a crucial part of Socrates's argument for the immortality of the soul, since he will eventually apply this theory to the relationship between life, death, and the soul. For now, though, he simply outlines the general notion that a thing's adherence to a Form dictates the nature of its existence.

Socrates reiterates his point by saying, "That which brings along some opposite […] will not admit the opposite to that which it brings along." He then shows that the soul "brings along" life, since it is what makes a person alive. As such, "whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it." Furthermore, life's opposite is death, meaning that won't allow death, since it can't "admit the opposite of that which it brings along." For these reasons, Socrates upholds that the soul is "deathless." In addition, that which is "deathless" must also be "indestructible," which means that the soul cannot be destroyed.

The soul, Socrates says, always "brings alongs life." This means that it can never "admit" death. That is, in the same way that snow always "brings" the Cold, the soul cannot exist without "bringing" life. In this way, Socrates effectively defines the soul by way of its aliveness, explaining the nature of its existence without having to use unreliable physical observations.

Socrates tells Cebes that, since the soul is "deathless" and "indestructible," it does not die with the body. Instead, it continues to live, going to the underworld. This has certain implications for "wicked" people, since the immortality of the soul makes it impossible for such people to "escape" their wrongdoings through death. Having suggested this, Socrates presents a vision of the afterlife, telling his listeners what he thinks happens to the soul when the body dies.

Now that Socrates has proved the immortality of the soul, he turns his attention to what, exactly, this immortality means for humans. Again, Socrates doesn't feel the need to prove that there is an underworld, instead taking it for granted that "wicked" souls will pay for their misdeeds in the afterlife. Again, he combines the results of his philosophical reasoning with broader religious beliefs—ones that would have been very familiar and acceptable to his audience.

According to Socrates's conception of the afterlife (which accords with various ancient myths), a spirit guides the soul to "a certain place," where the soul is "judged" before going to the underworld. After staying there for an "appointed" amount of time, the soul is led back to corporeal life by yet another spirit. Going into more detail, Socrates says that "impure" souls inadvertently repel their spirit guides, since "everybody shuns" them and is "unwilling to be [their] fellow traveler" or guide. Because of this, impure souls make their way aimlessly through the underworld, lonely and lost until they reach their "proper dwelling place."

As Socrates continues to present his vision of the underworld, readers see the extent to which knowledge of the soul's immortality affects the way people might live their lives. Indeed, if people know that bad behavior will force them to wander aimlessly through the underworld, they will likely try their hardest to be virtuous. In this way, Socrates's story about the afterlife lends his arguments about immortality a moralistic element.

Socrates says that the earth is "a sphere in the middle of the heavens" and that humans live in a "hollow of the earth," though everyone believes they live on the planet's surface. This, Socrates says, is not actually the case, since there is also the "upper limit of the air," where the divine dwell. There are also regions of the earth in which humans exist who have lived virtuous lives. These regions are currently inaccessible to Socrates and the others, since such areas are close to the true surface of the earth, where people mingle with the gods and live for much longer than the average human in Socrates's realm. In keeping with this, there are also regions that are "deeper" and "have a narrower opening" than the space in which Socrates and his friends occupy.

Socrates's description of the "upper limit of the air" sounds quite appealing, as the people who live there are able to convene with the gods and live long lives. This, it seems, isn't quite the same as traditional western notions of heaven, since the people in this region apparently still die. Through these descriptions, it becomes clear that Socrates's view of immortality accords with something like reincarnation, a notion implying that virtuous people will go on to lead better and better lives. Once again, then, his conception of the afterlife gives people an incentive to live virtuously.

The regions Socrates mentions are "connected" by rivers beneath earth's surface, he argues. There are four rivers (Oceanus, Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, and Cocytus). When souls "arrive" in the underworld, they are "judged." Souls of "average" virtue go to the Acheron, which takes them to the Acherusian lake, where they "dwell and are purified" of their misdeeds. If they are "incurable," they're thrown into Tartarus—the "deepest" waters—never to return. Souls whose wrongdoings are "curable" are also jettisoned into Tartarus but ejected a year later, at which point they're sent to the Acherusian lake, where they yell apologies to the people they've wronged. If they're forgiven, their "punishment" ends. If not, though, they're sent back to Tartarus to repeat the process until they're forgiven.

It's worth noting that people who lead immoral lives are given a chance to plead for forgiveness. Because Socrates believes the soul is immortal and that it often comes back to occupy new bodies, his idea of the afterlife is a bit more forgiving than Christian notions of Hell. At the same time, though, he upholds that certain souls are "incurable" and thus condemned forever. This, in turn, once again gives people an incentive to be virtuous, lest they end up spending eternity in the thrashing waters of Tartarus.

Socrates says that "extremely pious" souls are "freed and released from the regions of the earth," at which point they ascend to a "pure dwelling place" on the earth's surface. Furthermore, souls who have fully "purified" themselves through the practice of philosophy exist in a bodiless state, living "in the future" that Socrates says is difficult to depict. This, Socrates says, is why people should try hard to attain "virtue and wisdom" in life, since "the reward is beautiful." At the same time, he notes that it would be ridiculous to think of the afterlife as exactly as he has described it. Still, though, he thinks believing in this structure is worthwhile, since doing so might encourage people to "ignore the pleasures of the body" and invest themselves in "the pleasures of learning."

While Socrates suggests that good, "pious" people enjoy a superior existence amongst the gods, he believes that people who have truly "purified" themselves ascend to something even beyond this, achieving a state of being that transcends corporeal existence. This opinion makes sense, considering that Socrates thinks so lowly of the physical realm. In turn, it's rather unsurprising that he thinks the ultimate manifestation of a virtuous life would be completely untethered from the body. Furthermore, this idea once again frames the practice of philosophy as incomparably virtuous and good, since involving oneself in this kind of thought is—according to Socrates—the only way to reach a "beautiful" incorporeal existence. And though Socrates admits that the afterlife might not be exactly the way he has suggested, he maintains his belief that thinking in this manner will only lead to good things; that is, learning remains of utmost importance in its own right, even if its outcomes are uncertain.

Turning his attention to Socrates's coming execution, Crito asks if he'd like his friends to do anything for his children once he's gone. "Nothing new, Crito," Socrates says, adding that he only wants his friends to take "good care" of themselves. Crito then asks how they should bury him, but Socrates says he doesn't care, since he knows he'll no longer be associated with his corpse after he dies. He then goes to bathe himself for the final time, and when he returns, he speaks to his children and "the women of his household." When they leave, a jailer—who admits that he's become quite fond of Socrates—enters and tells him he'll soon have to drink the **poison**, and Socrates shows no hesitation in saying that he's ready to receive it.

In keeping with his belief that the body is unimportant compared to the soul, Socrates has no qualms embracing his imminent death. After all, he not only believes that his soul will go on living, but that it will achieve a higher form of existence. In this moment Socrates demonstrates the depth of his belief that he has no reason to fear or resent the end of his life.

The **poison** is brought in, and Socrates pours a "libation" to the gods before drinking it. After he swallows the poison, he walks around the cell to let it circulate through his blood. As he does this, his friends cry for him, and even Phaedo admits that he couldn't stop himself from shedding tears. "I was weeping for myself, not for him—for my misfortune in being deprived of such a comrade," he says. However, Socrates tells them all to stop, urging them to "control" themselves. At this point, he lies down and feels the poison work toward his heart. Just as it reaches that vital organ, he utters his final words: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget." "It shall be done," says Crito, adding, "tell us if there is anything else," but Socrates is already gone.

Asclepius is the Greek god of medicine. In Ancient times, people used to make sacrifices to him for healing their illnesses. It seems, then, that Socrates's final request that Crito offer a "cock to Asclepius" indicates that he sees life as a malady or illness of which Asclepius is about to cure him (through death). This accords with his belief that the body and physical world distract the soul from attaining true wisdom and, thus, virtue. On the verge of death, then, Socrates remains committed to his low opinion of corporeal life, eagerly embracing the separation of his soul from his body because he believes he's about to attain a superior form of existential purity. Additionally, the emotional reaction of Socrates's friends again shows how crucial genuine interpersonal connection is to the practice of philosophy.

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